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AUTHOR Batten Susan T.; Leiderman, Sally A.
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INSTITUTION Center for Assessment and Policy Development, Bala Cynwyd, PA.
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ABSTRACT

- Project Change was launched by the Levi Strauss Foundation in 1991 as an initiative to address racial prejudice and institutional racism in communities in which Levi Strauss & Co. had facilities. Working with multiracial coalitions in Albuquerque (New Mexico), El Paso (Texas), Valdosta (Georgia), and Knoxville (Tennessee), the Foundation and the Center for Assessment and Policy Development have learned a number of lessons about starting a corporate sponsored, community-driven, anti-racism initiative. Communities need to understand how difficult it is for multiracial groups to be inclusive and to reach consensus in a timely and efficient way. Task forces need a variety of people and a great deal of community support. A common approach will eventually emerge, and those who stay involved will be able to adapt their own strategies. However, specialized training and assistance are necessary to bring community representatives to that point. Corporate sponsors need to understand that local task forces need time to develop strategies and engage participants. An effective task force facilitates change. There is a role for outside assistance, but it is important to establish local ownership of the initiative promptly. The corporate sponsor can be a catalyst, but the community must be in charge ultimately. Experiences at the four project sites show the challenges antiracism programs face, but they also reveal the potential of these initiatives for community improvement. (SLD)

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PLANNING AN ANTI-RACISM INITIATIVE

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HOW TO PLAN AN ANTI-RACISM INITIATIVE

Background

Project Change was launched by the Levi Strauss Foundation in 1991 as an initiative to address racial prejudice and institutional racism — the subordination of specific racial or ethnic groups through institutional policies and practices — in Levi Strauss & Co. plant communities. Working with multi-racial coalitions in four communities — Albuquerque, New Mexico; El Paso, Texas; Valdosta, Georgia; and Knoxville, Tennessee — the Levi Strauss Foundation is funding locally driven strategies to achieve the following goals:

- dismantle institutional policies and practices that promote or encourage racial discrimination;
- ease tension between majority and minority groups, as well as inter-ethnic conflicts;
- promote fair representation of community diversity in the leadership of important community institutions; and
- stop or prevent overt acts of racial and cultural prejudice.

Project Change evolved from two years of research sponsored by the Levi Strauss Foundation to assess the state of race relations in U.S. communities where the company has a presence. Findings confirmed that racism is a pervasive national problem. Institutional



and social barriers, as well as discriminatory beliefs and individual behaviors, continue to prevent many people from realizing basic human rights. The research also found that:

- community leaders are eager to participate in an anti-racism initiative and to receive support from the Levi Strauss Foundation in identifying multi-racial teams to spearhead local efforts;
- current data on the state of race and race relations are not readily available in local communities — evidence of the problem is generally anecdotal rather than objective; and
- people generally do not have a clear understanding of how institutional racism functions or how to address its complexities.

"When the research came out, it was very hard to bear. But even the negative reaction created a gelling of people who saw the positive aspects."

— TASK FORCE MEMBER,
VALDOSTA



The Levi Strauss Foundation convened a national advisory board to provide direction on the focus and structure of a national funding initiative to combat racism. This initiative became Project Change.

Three initial sites were selected based on interest from local leaders and their willingness to address racism in a multi-racial forum. A fourth site was added later.

Albuquerque, New Mexico — Albuquerque is rapidly becoming a city where people of color are the majority. The city's 1/2 million residents include Anglos, Hispanics, Native Americans, African Americans and Asian Americans. While tourist brochures present Albuquerque as a "multicultural metropolis" with a rich tradition of diversity, when Project Change began in 1992, citizens of this community expressed a need to confront racial divisions and historic inequities. Now in the third year of its action plan, Project Change has successfully built the base for a community coalition on racism and become a visible force in the community. Its action plan addresses discrimination in financial lending institutions, racial inequality in city public schools, and strategies for reducing racial discrimination and interracial conflict throughout the community.

El Paso, Texas — Located on the border of Mexico, El Paso's history is rooted in both the United States and Mexico. El Paso's population is 600,000, but just across the river is Ciudad Juarez with more than 1 million people, many of whom cross the border daily for work and business. The city is 70% Hispanic, offering a rich mosaic of Mexican Americans, Anglos, African Americans, Native Americans and Asian Americans. Project Change has had a difficult time forging a diverse coalition, but the local task force

remains committed to building a multi-racial collaborative to combat racism in the community.

Knoxville, Tennessee — A small southern Appalachian city of 165,000, Knoxville looks to its future through its roots of Cherokee Indians, white immigrant settlers and African Americans. Knoxville today is 16% African American with Native Americans, Hispanics and Asian Americans combined constituting less than 2% of the city's population. Following an 18-month planning period, Project Change in Knoxville is launching its three-year action plan. In this first year, it will focus on educational equity in the public schools and community awareness and outreach, utilizing the results of research conducted during their planning phase.

Valdosta, Georgia — Valdosta is a town of less than 50,000 people at the junction of two highways just north of the Florida state line. Its population is nearly equally divided between African Americans and whites, yet significant inequalities exist in the economic, educational, social and political lives of the two communities. Project Change began in Valdosta in 1992 and is currently in the second year of a three-year action plan to combat institutional racism. Its work is focused on increasing access to financial credit for people of color, strengthening leadership in the African American community, and developing and advocating a multicultural curriculum in the public schools.

The Project Change model originally included two major phases:

1. a short-term planning phase in which grants are awarded to a local task force to support coalition

building, technical assistance, research on the state of race and race relations, and action planning; and

2. a three-year action phase during which local coalitions work with target institutions and other community partners to implement anti-racism strategies.

Recently, the Foundation added a third phase, where warranted, providing two years of transitional funding and technical assistance as sites become independent.

Introduction

This document discusses lessons learned about starting a corporate foundation-sponsored, community-driven, anti-racism initiative. It focuses solely on the planning and start-up activities in each Project Change site and the issues communities face during this phase of the project. This report is the first in a series of subsequent reports that will document the efforts of Project Change communities to put anti-racist strategies into action and show the outcomes of their work. The lessons are drawn from an evaluation of Project Change that was conducted for the Levi Strauss Foundation by the Center for Assessment and Policy Development (CAPD). They are based on interviews with Foundation staff, technical assistance providers, current and former task force members from each of the four pilot sites, local project staff, and a range of community observers associated with Project Change activities. The lessons presented in this document are CAPD's opinions based on these discussions. This account should be viewed as a "work in progress" since insights will continue to evolve and new lessons will be learned as sites move forward from planning to action.

Planning Phase of the Project Change Model

The planning phase includes the following components:

1. In-depth community interviews to gauge interest and identify a diverse group of local leaders;
2. Recruitment of a multi-racial volunteer task force, the majority of whose members are women and people of color;
3. Selection by the task force of a local fiscal sponsor to handle grant monies for the task force;
4. An initial two-day retreat to provide task force members with training in the areas of prejudice reduction and unlearning racism;
5. Research to inform task forces about the nature and effects of racism in their community and to raise community awareness;
6. Training and technical assistance to local task forces in institutionalized racism, media relations, coalition building, diversity, group dynamics, team building and strategic planning;
7. Community outreach and education to obtain broad community ownership of Project Change beyond the task forces and affected institutions;
8. Action plans to identify target institutions and strategies to reduce institutional racism and to produce intended outcomes; and
9. Evaluation.

"Anti-racism work takes a lot of guts. It's easy on paper but hard on people. When you get to action, people start to back off."

— TASK FORCE MEMBER,
EL PASO

WHAT COMMUNITIES SHOULD KNOW

"A major structural tension is consensus decision making.

The expectation is that everyone is involved in every decision. It takes time and training to do this well. "

— PROJECT CHANGE STAFF,
ALBUQUERQUE

1. It is difficult for multi-racial groups to be inclusive and reach consensus on anti-racism strategies in a timely and efficient manner. Groups must find ways to retain, yet work through, their individual differences in order to be successful.

Groups that are highly similar in make-up, ideology and approach to anti-racism work find it easier to reach consensus, plan and implement strategies. But the Project Change model challenges groups to be diverse and to model certain kinds of behavior — respect for differences, consensus decision making and candor about race and race relations. These behaviors are not easily achieved when people from different walks of life come together. Thus, diverse groups find planning tasks more difficult and may need more time to complete them.

At the same time, community expectations and funders impose a sense of urgency on the planning work, so that action strategies can be implemented as soon as possible. Sites struggle with striking a balance between being inclusive and completing a workplan within specific timeframes. Sites have not found a short-cut to accomplishing both sets of tasks. Rushing to consensus in order to complete planning by a fixed date works only in the short-run; decisions based on superficial consensus tend to break down in implementation.



2. Task forces need a range of people with specific experiences to plan and implement institutional racism strategies. The level of buy-in and community support enjoyed by task forces is directly related to the roles, connections and networks of participating volunteer members.

A strong task force needs: people who can open doors to important institutions (e.g. bank officers, government officials, school board members, leaders in communities of color, etc.); people who can articulate problems facing the victims of racism (e.g. social activists, academics, etc.); enough grassroots members

Participation Issues in a Community Anti-Racism Effort

If the focus of a community effort is institutional racism, it is critical to involve volunteers who have ties to community institutions and are identified with reform in those institutions.

In addition, the involvement of people who are leaders in neighborhoods is extremely important to community-wide buy-in and participation. These leaders are often overlooked by the power structure.

There are certain groups that may be harder to retain than others in multi-racial anti-racism efforts like Project Change. These include:

- people with fewer resources, frequently the people most often victims of oppression. Their employment situations may make it difficult for them to participate in meetings, transportation can be a barrier, and meeting locations may make them feel unwelcome or uncomfortable;
- grassroots leaders with other approaches to undoing racism;
- task-oriented people who are impatient with the level of "process" work involved in undoing racism, which focuses on how things are done and on feelings, beliefs and experiences with racism; and
- people who benefit from the status quo, often white males.



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"Everything has to do with who the task force is in terms of years of experience and placement in the community. There has to be knowledge about the media and movers and shakers. There also needs to be community leaders... We did community outreach in a way that made people feel like they belonged."

— TASK FORCE MEMBER,
ALBUQUERQUE



to counterbalance institutional power and resistance to change (e.g. neighborhood association leaders, community organizers, etc.) and people who are change agents.

When focusing on institutional racism, there is considerable value to involving volunteers who have ties to community institutions but are identified with reform in those institutions. They provide institutional knowledge and entree without commitment to the status quo. Public participation in an anti-racism task force requires considerable courage, even in the 1990s. Task force members can lose their jobs,

clients, funding, customers and friends. Some types of individuals may find it particularly risky to lead these efforts, including elected officials and leaders of civil rights groups that have an advocacy, rather than a multi-racial, agenda.

Turf issues are inevitable in any kind of community coalition or collaborative effort. They are more difficult to address openly, and often more personally wounding, in anti-racist, multi-racial work. In every Project Change community, some groups or individuals have been accused of "selling out" or "pandering" because of their participation in Project Change. It is not reasonable to expect a few individuals to represent every facet of a community or all others who share the same race or ethnic background. Task forces have learned that they need to create legitimacy through constant communication and outreach. Even with good will and hard effort, turf issues will continue to arise in this work. Because they are structural issues, structural responses have to be developed (e.g. rotating leadership, partnerships with other anti-racism efforts, intra-group organizing efforts, etc.).

3. A common approach to anti-racism work will emerge in multi-racial coalitions; those that stay involved will be able to adapt their individual strategies in order to support a common agenda.

There are many ways to approach anti-racism work. Differences in approach often are related to appropriate levels of confrontation and stem from personal style, political ideology and personal experiences with racism. Volunteers who stayed with Project Change found a middle ground. Those who believed

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strongly in a very confrontational approach and those who were adverse to any confrontation had difficulty adjusting and discontinued participation on local task forces. Project Change is a good fit for people who agree to combat racism in a collaborative, multi-racial way.

4. Research data on the local effects of institutional racism form the rationale for action strategies, raise community awareness of the problem and gain community buy-in. However, reaching consensus on interpretation of the research is a difficult task for a newly formed and diverse group.

With assistance from the Foundation, each community developed a state of race and race relations report that included historical, attitudinal and demographic data. Demographic data illustrating socio-economic disparities based on race proved to be the most helpful in defending action strategies to the larger community.

Project Change communities used summaries of their extensive racism research to introduce their efforts to the public. They conducted briefings for the public and the media, sponsored town meetings, and convened focus groups to report on findings and solicit input on anti-racism efforts. While these meetings raised controversy and denial about racism in the communities, they also elicited commitment from individuals and institutions to pursue strategies in undoing racism.

All sites struggled through the research phase — primarily because it was the first task. Any task early in a multi-racial community effort will be difficult for a group that has not had time to develop trust and to benefit from quality training in anti-racism and group dynamics.

5. Specialized training and technical assistance must be provided to enable diverse task force members to talk about race and reach a common understanding of racism.

Skilled facilitation is critical in order for a diverse and formerly unconnected group to talk candidly about race. Groups need training to develop a shared understanding of institutional racism that focuses on underlying causes rather than symptoms and addresses issues related to internalized oppression.

Some communities resisted outside technical assistance because they believed that local resources could be equally effective and they wanted to avoid confronting racial differences directly. However, some task force members recognized that resistance can be a signal that outside assistance is needed. Local groups needed to have a voice in selecting technical assistance providers and structuring training. Once sites had experienced quality technical assistance, they became more open to outside technical assistance as an ongoing resource for their work.

Task forces found that the "halo" effects of training did not always last, particularly when they needed to take public action as a united group (for example, when releasing research findings or beginning to implement action strategies). Appropriately timed follow-up training and facilitation was a critical aid to helping the group overcome these challenges.



"Training and technical assistance that help build trust and allow people to share where they are coming from is critical. This takes time, people don't share right off the bat."

— PROJECT CHANGE STAFF,
KNOXVILLE

Technical Assistance and Training for Local Anti-Racism Groups

The Levi Strauss Foundation provided training and technical assistance to local task forces in institutional racism, media relations, coalition building, diversity, group dynamics, team building and strategic planning.

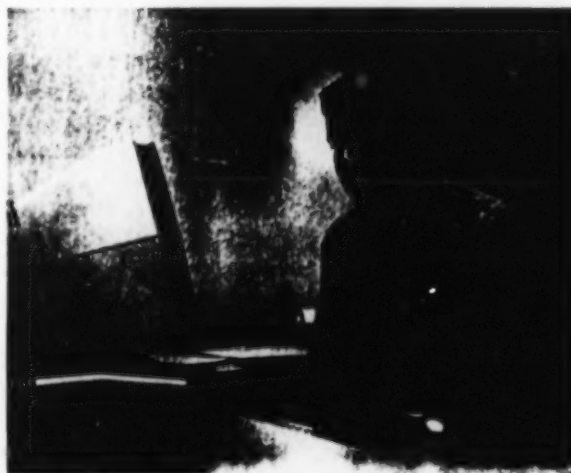
- Institutional racism is less understood than racial prejudice. Specific training in institutional racism is needed to help groups analyze the systemic nature of oppression and develop strategies to undo it.
- High-quality training and technical assistance in media relations, coalition building, diversity, group dynamics, team building, and strategic planning will facilitate progress by local coalitions.
- Training a small number of volunteers, who in turn train others, may be an effective way to develop leadership and increase the community's capacity to do anti-racism work.
- Information is needed for participating communities about specific strategies that have been successful in reducing institutional racism. Technical assistance in this area may reduce wasted time spent reinventing the wheel and will enhance sites' strategic planning capability.
- Examples of models for shared power and decision making may assist local anti-racist groups. New forms of leadership are at the crux of contemporary social justice and coalition building efforts, however these models pose challenges for volunteers.
- Trainers should understand institutional racism and reflect the diversity in the community.
- Funders can play a key role in identifying state-of-the-art training and technical assistance at the national level and providing this information to local communities.

WHAT SPONSORS SHOULD KNOW

1. Foremost among lessons learned is that local task forces need time to develop anti-racism strategies and engage community partners. Volunteer task forces must educate themselves about institutional racism, hone their group dynamic skills, and work through inevitable conflicts that arise among diverse groups, especially when tackling such complex issues.

The Foundation anticipated that sites would require approximately six months for the "pre-action" phase. Most sites needed at least twice as long to develop adequate action plans. As noted earlier, time was necessary for groups to educate themselves, to achieve a balance between process and task work, to reach meaningful consensus and to develop enough trust in a multi-racial setting to have frank discussions that could move the work forward. Volunteers suggested that shared experiences, professional facilitation and training and the passage of time were essential to building trust and increased understanding.

Anti-racism work is so difficult, and so personally involving, that even the usual kinds of problems facing communities during start-up of a collaborative planning effort are very stressful. In hindsight, a more realistic timeframe (perhaps twelve months) would have created an appropriate sense of urgency without making both the sites and the Foundation



feel that they had somehow "failed" by not meeting arbitrary deadlines.

2. Although the long-term outcome of Project Change will not be known for some time, there appear to be four factors that facilitate success during planning. They include:

- an effective task force that is cohesive and has developed the level of trust necessary to conduct anti-racism work;
- effective, consistent staff that can work with volunteers and build on their strengths;

"The Foundation put forth a multiple agenda; they told us to be visible, be inclusive and make it a movement. At the same time, we were under pressure to implement specific programs, be narrow and focused on institutions. These aren't always compatible priorities."

— PROJECT CHANGE STAFF,
ALBUQUERQUE

"It's sort of threatening when someone from the outside comes in to tell you that you have a problem [i.e. racism].

Sometimes, though, you have to shake things up and offend people."

— COMMUNITY OBSERVER,
VALDOSTA

- community conditions that support, or at least permit, multi-racial, anti-racist work; and
- productive relationships between the local project and the funder in which roles, responsibilities and expectations are clear.

The experience of Project Change sites indicates that some combination of these factors must be in place in order to move successfully from planning to implementation. Even in the early stages, it is clear that the success of Project Change is not wholly dependent on either the Foundation or the sites; some factors are outside the control of one or the other or both. A true partnership between the Foundation and the site is necessary to move the initiative forward, but issues of autonomy and control challenge the partnership and must be recognized and addressed.

3. There are advantages to using someone from outside the community (such as Foundation staff) to initiate an anti-racism effort, though it is important to establish local ownership as quickly as possible after the project is initiated. There are also some disadvantages to this approach, but lessons have been learned about how to overcome them.

While Levi Strauss & Co. has plants in each of the Project Change communities, Foundation staff headquartered in California, outside the Project Change communities, did the initial organizing work in the sites.

Some advantages to consider are that it may be easier for people from outside a community to raise the issue of racism. Discussions of racism often bring up feelings of denial, guilt and uncertainty among

whites, and anger and urgency among people of color. As noted earlier, there are risks associated with leading and/or participating in an anti-racism initiative — risks that may be too high for some local people to take. Further, outside Foundation staff can serve as a lightning rod to attract some of these emotions and deflect them from local partners.

Foundation staff can also bring non-traditional partners to the table. Local Project Change task forces include high-ranking education officials, heads of nonprofit organizations, school teachers, government employees, politicians and grassroots community leaders. A person within the community with ties to specific groups may have difficulty convening such a body. Project Change has established new relationships among these individuals and is building bridges across race.

Some disadvantages to consider are that Foundation staff headquartered outside of the community may not understand the politics or culture of a community and, thus, may make mistakes in selecting an initial task force or proposing a planning approach. In addition, local participants may give too much weight to the opinions of Foundation staff because they represent the funder. This dynamic can result in nominal buy-in and ownership of the project by local participants.

In any case, an important lesson is that the Foundation has to be extremely sensitive to these issues and encourage local leaders as early as possible to play the major role in planning and presenting the effort to the community. Representatives from the sites need to be acknowledged as the experts on local conditions, even before it is reasonable to expect that they are experts on anti-racism.

As part of developing local ownership of the initiative, sites may demand more autonomy or confront the Foundation on other issues. These confrontations should be considered healthy and productive. Foundation staff should respond by modeling the kind of partnership behavior that they hope can be developed in the communities — clear expectations coupled with careful listening and a willingness to change course based on solid argument.

4. It is possible for a major corporate foundation to serve as a catalyst for community anti-racism initiatives. However, this role poses risks for community planning groups as well as the corporate foundation host.

Community groups can benefit from affiliation with a major corporate foundation host. Project Change task forces were able to leverage their relationship with the Levi Strauss Foundation to engage institutional partners. They also benefited from the availability of corporate resources such as media and communications expertise.

However, the Project Change approach raises several issues for both partners. First, it is important for corporate foundation hosts to allow local task forces to create some distance between the anti-racism project and its sponsor. This minimizes the burden for local task forces who are sometimes called upon to defend internal policies and practices of a corporate funder. Second, corporate foundations and other major institutions initiating anti-racism efforts will face risks. High visibility in anti-racism work opens the corporate sponsor to scrutiny of its hiring policies and other practices.



In each of the Project Change sites, volunteers struggled with whether or not an institution can sponsor an effort focusing on institutional racism, whether the Levi Strauss Foundation undertook this initiative solely for public relations reasons, and if the Foundation had a hidden agenda. Each of the task forces needed time to allay their concerns about these issues.

"There is a perception that the same model or process needs to be applied to all four sites. But, [the Foundation] needs to listen to our differences."

— TASK FORCE MEMBER,
EL PASO

HOW A SPONSOR CAN SUPPORT THE EFFORT

"Project Change's role in the future of Knoxville is to serve as a facilitator in bringing people together — an informer, an educator and an initiator."

— TASK FORCE MEMBER,
KNOXVILLE

Levi Strauss & Co. is a major employer in all Project Change sites; participating volunteers have benefited from their relationship with the company in many ways. For example, visits from the company CEO were instrumental in attracting top business leaders to forums on racism and diversity in the workplace. The participation of these people is important given Project Change's focus on institutional racism.

In El Paso, 120 community leaders from the media, business, government and civic organizations turned out to hear the CEO's keynote address and participate in an Excellence Through Diversity workshop.

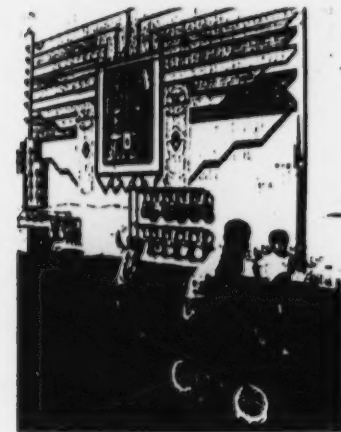
In Albuquerque, 130 business leaders attended a CEO breakfast sponsored by Project Change, the Economic Forum (an organization of 100 chief executive officers and business owners in Albuquerque) and the University of New Mexico Anderson School of Management. After the keynote address by the Levi Strauss & Co. CEO and a leading diversity consultant, 52 business leaders signed up to learn more about Project Change.



Other ways in which the company supported Project Change sites include providing technical assistance on media strategies and using the Foundation's contacts to increase awareness of the effort through participation in conferences and meetings with other funders.

Lessons for Potential Funders

- In efforts like Project Change, plan on at least one year for communities to form task forces and plan action strategies.
- Address issues of autonomy and control early on. While these issues are common in community/foundation collaborations, they are exacerbated by Project Change's focus on combating oppression and promoting shared power. An important element of Project Change is the local task force's ability to select their own fiscal sponsor and staff. While the Foundation was initially reluctant to relinquish control, this arrangement proved to work well for both the community and the Foundation.
- Assist sites in compiling research on race and race relations in their communities early in the process to help them get started. This should include demographic information on key social and economic indicators by race and ethnicity and may be complemented by qualitative data capturing community perceptions of racism and race relations.
- Provide specialized training and technical assistance early in the planning phase to help volunteers tackle difficult discussions on race.
- Institute strategies to celebrate successes and increase opportunities to recognize volunteer efforts.
- Begin an evaluation process at the onset of the project. This allows for better data collection, analysis and timely feedback to sites.



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EMERGING ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

"El Paso is in the midst of change. Change can't happen without understanding and this is the role that Project Change plays."

— COMMUNITY OBSERVER,
EL PASO

While early experiences in the four sites provide lessons on starting a community anti-racism initiative, they also raise questions that warrant attention as Project Change communities move forward to implement strategies.

1. How successful can a community-based initiative be in facilitating institutional change?

Project Change seeks institutional change, but hasn't funded institutions directly. The model presumes that local institutions will implement strategies developed by task forces representing diverse sectors of their community, because these task forces can create enough visibility, incentives and sanctions to promote change. The efficacy of this process will become clearer over time.

2. Does anti-racism work satisfy funders' needs for tangible results within a reasonable period of time?

Dismantling racism will require a long, arduous process that may not produce immediate, measurable results. In the short-term, Project Change — as well as other anti-racism initiatives — may produce more qualitative than quantitative outcomes. Outcomes such as collaboration across racial lines and increased community awareness of institutional racism may



challenge funders' traditional means of measuring success in quantitative terms.

3. What strategies are effective in reducing institutional racism?

Project Change communities need more information about anti-racism strategies that have been tried and proven effective. Communities developing and implementing workplans can benefit from the experience of others so they will not need to spend time "reinventing the wheel."

4. Will some institutions be more willing than others to participate in Project Change?

Two Project Change communities have developed working partnerships with local banks. Because banks are under legislative mandates to ensure fair lending practices, they benefit directly from their collaboration with Project Change. It will be important to watch how other institutions react to Project Change's invitations to assess internal policies and practices and to see if they are willing to join in a collaborative effort to end institutional racism.

5. How will the current state of race relations affect contemporary efforts to combat racism?

The current discussion on affirmative action, along with the rise in anti-immigrant sentiment and legislation are illustrative of the current climate of intolerance in our country. With this new climate comes

a change in the tone and nature of the debate on racism. New concerns arise in the discourse around what people can do to address these issues. There is an urgent need for local leadership to confront racism, which may strengthen Project Change efforts in participating communities since community stakeholders are critical to the work. „

6. How will volunteers develop the skills to work effectively in multi-racial groups on the complex issue of racism?

Specialized skills are needed to create and maintain multi-racial, multi-cultural coalitions. Issues related to cross-cultural communications and the dynamics of race, class and gender pose major challenges for Project Change task forces. Ongoing technical assistance and training and a significant amount of volunteer time will be required to address these issues.



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AUTHORS:

Susan T. Batten
Sally A. Leiderman

CENTER FOR ASSESSMENT AND POLICY DEVELOPMENT
111 Presidential Boulevard, Suite 234
Bala Cynwyd, PA 19004
Telephone: (610) 664-4540
FAX: (610) 664-6099